



## **King County**

### **Records and Licensing Services Division**

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September 18, 2008

TO: Jim Buck, Director of Executive Services

FM: Carolyn Ableman, Director, Records and Licensing Services

**RE: Summary of Volunteer Vets Project organized by Redmond Animal Hospital**  
**Medical Director: April – August 2008**

The "volunteer vets project" were provided to KCACC by Council in lieu of requested funding in Motion No. 12737. Monies proposed to be allocated for veterinary services were instead used for volunteer vet supplies and a shelter auditor, with Council urging the use of volunteer vets.

Initially, KCACC received an email stream that was inadvertently sent to a shelter volunteer that relayed a message to VCA vets that their assistance was needed to triage a large number of animals in distress at the Kent Animal Shelter. Ms. Kim Sgro was organizing this effort with the help of Dr. Brad Crauer. The email message indicated that the shelter was to be closed down and that the local vets needed to come to the assistance of the animals. Ms. Sgro was contacted and she said "they" were given the "wrong information" and that she had re-sent the email to the vet group simply asking for help in caring for the excess dogs and cats.

The start of this volunteer vet project coincided with KCACC's receipt of increased appropriation for additional officer and program staff and facility/animal kennel and caging. Staff were working hard to quickly implement a variety of programs designed to alleviate the shelter conditions and improve programs such as the adoption and rescue programs.

**TIMEFRAME:** Dr. Crauer almost immediately stated his concern that he saw no immediate improvement in what he thought we should do regarding medical protocol improvements. He informed KCACC via a meeting with Ms. Claire Davis, and Council staff that he was discouraged and that he wanted the vets to quit doing "foster care" for the animals at their respective locations, and that he preferred having the volunteer vets supplement Dr. Christensen's surgeries, so that she could more quickly complete updating medical protocols.

To implement Dr. Crauer's idea, RALS Management met with Dr. Crauer and KCACC management and veterinarian staff to request development of schedule of regular visits to facilitate, more quickly, updating all protocols. The vets involved continued to show up irregularly, making it difficult for Dr. Christensen to effectively use volunteer vets to supplement her surgeries. The volunteer vets visited the shelter 14 times from April - July, 2008. When they did visit they did whatever they felt needed immediate attention - medical rounds, administering meds, and, sometimes would take animals to their clinics to do more extensive procedures.

The volunteer vets treated and housed sick animals that were beyond KCACC's capabilities (overnight in-clinic care, x-ray machines etc.), and several vet hospitals were willing to take a large number of infectious cats. Most animals checked into a shelter have very poor health upon entry and typically have had little to no medical care most of their lives. This type of background makes Shelter animal populations, medical needs and care issues very difficult from those encountered in private practice.

Dr. Redmond offered the Kent Animal Hospital as a go-to hospital for orphaned kittens or pregnant cats to relieve pressure on the KCACC nursery, and vet specialists in Kirkland volunteered to take on whatever veterinary needs the Crossroads Shelter may have had. Regarding the Spay Station, Dr. Crauer relayed to us that the volunteer vets would not be particularly interested in doing this, since it demanded a specialty in quick spay/neutering and triage work on a large population of animals that most of the clinic vets do not perform.

Approximately \$7,000 was charged to the agency for medical procedures and supplies, but not all charges were at-cost and often reflected retail charges. This amount of money was spent on approximately 14 animals in total. We asked for clarification on these charges, which Kim Sgro said she would investigate, but the higher charges remain on many of the bills. However, the vets did begin charging us their base cost after that inquiry.

Wendy Keller became the Acting Manager of KCACC in early July and organized a tour and meeting on July 17th with Dr. Crauer, Kim Sgro and Claire Davis at the shelter. These individuals had been relaying vet feedback surveys and their own suggestions for improvements which were read, discussed, considered and often implemented - especially those that could be done in the short term. The meeting at the shelter in July was to show changes and/or suggestions that were implemented. They seemed receptive and encouraged about what improvements they observed. At that time they and the vets who came to the shelter were asked to talk directly to staff at any time if they saw other issues. Direct dialogue between shelter staff and the volunteer vets rarely happened and feedback instead was given or sent to the county council and/or council staff.

There were only two volunteer vet visits in the latter part of July (since Wendy Keller's appointment). One vet identified some issues but did not relay them to the shelter but rather sent her comments to a select mailing list. Wendy reiterated the request to report while on site so that we could jointly review any issues. The last vet to visit the Shelter was on July 30<sup>th</sup>. This vet sent a report later the same day which stated things looked good (other than exploding with cats). The vet also had a couple of non-medical things to report. Both suggestions were helpful and Wendy thanked her in writing.

A lot has been accomplished since that time including the install of the new cages.

We have a huge number of volunteers coming daily into the facility who have commented very positively on all the change. More changes are being implemented. The number of sick animals has decreased significantly at the shelter. Veterinary care was and is a constant need and these volunteer vets were there for that purpose.

I am discouraged that these volunteer vets chose to look at their relationship with KCACC as hostile. That is simply not true. The proposal for veterinary services originally in Motion No. 12737, demonstrated KCACC's understanding of the need for same and the benefits such would/could provide to the animals in the Shelters. Volunteer vets were certainly viewed as an acceptable substitute for the contract veterinary services that were proposed. However, the apparent scope of work these volunteer vets provided, or were willing to provide, exceeded the rendering of veterinary care to the animals and extended to oversight of policy issues at KCACC. This placed these volunteer vets into the "policy discussion" which clearly became, in early August 2008, very public and very uncomfortable. When letters were sent from Kent Animal Shelter volunteers to the King County Council and Executive office, with allegations of unprofessional actions at the shelter by Dr. Crauer, the "resignation" letter by Dr. Crauer soon followed.

The overall impact is a reduction in the level of "free" or "volunteer" care which has to be substituted for with contract veterinary services. The funding for veterinary care for the animals having been removed (and volunteer vets provided in its stead), leaves KCACC with no volunteer veterinary care and no funding for contract veterinary care. This is not what was intended. Veterinary care is needed at levels above those which are currently funded.

We would be remiss however in not expressing appreciation for the veterinary care these volunteer vets provided to the animals. While it is unfortunate these volunteer vets have not continued to treat shelter animals – someone has to. KCACC is committed to opening its doors – as we did with these volunteer vets – to obtain increased levels of veterinary care from the community or contractually. It is what must occur.